

JULY'S PEOPLE by Nadine Gordimer, an Apartheid and Women
Discrimination based Novel.



Topic prepared by: SABA NAZ

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Riphah International University Lahore

Email: mmahfah@yahoo.com

Topic Assigned by: Islam Khan

July's People is a novel about fictional civil war in which black South Africans have violently overturned the system of **APARTHEID** – '**separateness**', it was a system of institutionalized racial discrimination that existed in South Africa between 1948 – 1991. It was based on white supremacy and the repression of the black, African, colored and Indian – majority of the benefits were for the politically and economically dominant group, Afrikaners, and other Whites. And due to this revolution The Smales family is bound to take help of their black servant, named July. The novel depicts the ideas about salvation, power and truth, primitivism, racial hierarchy, and liberal hypocrisy with addition of Black liberation.

Gordimer's unsaid expressions and unexplained cultural and social codes kept the scenes perplexing and hard to interpret. This text, objectively, accuses Maureen the colonizer, for holding some racist and capitalist opinions, thus distancing herself from the world in which she lived. Even when she switched roles with her husband, she failed to live the expectation of her people and the other. The last scene is highly optimistic where Maureen simply tries to escape her present into the world of unknown in the hope of finding a world that might accept her as she is not as she should be.

July's people – a post-apartheid writing reflects upon the '**mood of white liberal failure**', that witnessed a variety of '**morbid symptoms**'. Here are two conflicting scenes in which roles are switched: the black servant, July, became a master and the master became a servant or a follower, the Smales.

After spreading revolution, the white liberals don't feel safe, so the Smales – representative of the colonizer white society, move to July's town in search of refuge where their life turns upside down by fully dependent on their

servant who is their new master. But they becomes unable to accept the situation and decide not to take off their colonizer's garments. They tighten their grip on their own properties and decide not to abandon their past, reject every attempt of creating an '**economic balance**' because they don't accept that past is over.

Maureen looks defeated after failing to communicate with July in matter of convincing him that they both are '**EQUAL**' and she has never been superior to him. Her running towards the helicopter depicts the **future-rebirth** of South Africa, in its open-ending, here's a '**principle of hope**' – utopian horizon; predicting an act of preparing for the '**authentic future**' in cultural sphere. Here's a reversal of roles for the black world, and the Smales' children. The Smales enters into a new phase in life where they cannot live peacefully without material objects.

The book depicts **dystopian vision** by the inability of white liberals to share their wealth and possession with the blacks, and they insist on the norms and traditions which they inherit by **apartheid's racial policies**. A utopian vision is bound to occur only as a result of economic balance but because of the negligence of white liberals, causes the instability in securing the South African nation and ceasing the political horror.

Here reflects a **utopian life** for the blacks who will emerge victorious from their struggle for economic justice, and a dystopian future for the white liberals who find themselves in a subordinated position, rule by blacks. It provides an understanding of society, its cultural codes and attitudes, and acknowledges their important function and the process of creating new possibilities, exploring the relations between different systems.

The mutual roles between the owner-colonizer, and the servant-colonized are mingled for bringing the white's culture and the black's culture together by

accepting the other's language, tradition and norms. The Smales fail to construct their own identities during apartheid because they are so possessive for their belonging – Bakkie and gun etc. Their unreadiness for co-exist in a future which is expectedly more unsecure and unpredictable than their present. Maureen is '**left in vacuum, and her identity shattered**'. She looks at only one aspect of her failure: constructs her own identity in accordance with possession.

However, she fails to see other important thoughts such as why she switches role with her husband, why she fails to communicate with July and the Blacks, and why she alienates herself from her family. She fails to deal in motherly manner with her children, especially when Bam starts to take care of everything inside the house such as feeding the children and doing the household.

The writer ignore the criticism of the blacks' silence. She doesn't look bias in favor of the white liberals, she writes from the perspective of a white liberal full of '**national consciousness**' to South Africa. The gun functions as a tool for killing, and the act of killing is not for sport or fun; it is for '**survival**'. The '**violence which underpins the bourgeois power**'.

Maureen is rebelling against July and rejecting to be one of his people, she is a self-destructing figure in running for a fatal future where she be doomed. She is the one who wants to meet July as she used to do in the past. Frantz Fanon, in his **The Wretched of the Earth** explains that once the colonizer (here Maureen) becomes unable to confront with the colonized subjects, she chooses the way of table talk for slowing down the violence of the colonized. She no longer trust in eternal power, and submit to the will of the colonized and forget, though temporarily, about her racist power. She reaches a deadlock when she can't convince him that her capitalist mentality is replaced

with her liberal views. She tells him '**you are not a servant**' because she skips to call her '**the master**' which is the end of her colonization.

Maureen's failure also finds in her inability to accept the 'other'. July is forced to ask for permission for even trivial things, as he used to ask for everything. She confesses that in her past, she intends to put July under her control, '**total dependency**', and never excuses him in the present because '**moral relativism**' applies only to her. She thinks that she's justified in looting a pharmacy because she's in urgent need; but July isn't justified in stealing things because he's not a '**Maureen**'. We see a reversal of Maureen's past in which she tries to debase and humiliate July by sending him '**oral message**' ordering to come to her.

She isn't a suitable representative for post-apartheid future because she fails to prove herself physical and socially powerful, gains no establishment and becomes immobilized and helpless human. She always looks outside the sphere of the '**hierarchical structure**' and '**staggers with fear**'. The Smales' children may take their leading role in the new epoch – revolutionary change hence not easy, they'll rebel against their past, traditions and everything imposed on them by their parents.

Gina's mastering than her mother in the language of the '**other**' enables her to better socialize, communicate and understand them. While Maureen doesn't have any black friend except Lydia, who acts more like a servant than a friend; and fails to adopt the new life standard. As Lydia lifts her burden in the past, as the July's takes the responsibility of Smales' security.

Gina's character depicts modern colonialist while her mother seems former imperialist. She adopts opposing traditions and values, she has befriended Africa and the Africans including their communal traditions in which the older children help to raise the younger children. The same case we notice in Victor,

the black boys are interested in sharing Victor's electric racing car track; which means that he's socially accepted by them, unlike their parents. They can survive under harsh conditions, opposite to their parents.

In conclusion, the Smales' children are the future of South Africa but the final scene points to the annihilation of **'the ruling classes'**. They present the coexistence and positive communication with the South Africans. The novel holds one message: new beginning that means new life, a new future; a future that has no past, no Maureen and no Bam. This **'new life'** starts when Maureen's role ends, and she runs toward the helicopter.